

## REPORT OF THE COUNCIL.

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In the past six months the Society has lost six of its members: Edmund Arthur Engler, of St. Louis, who died January 16, 1918; Hubert Howe Bancroft, of San Francisco, who died March 2, 1918; Charles Card Smith, of Boston, who died March 20, 1918; Henry Adams, of Washington, D. C., who died March 27, 1918; Eugene Frederick Bliss, of Cincinnati, who died April 4, 1918; and William DeLoss Love, of Hartford, who died April 8, 1918.

The librarian reports that the accessions in the six months have been fewer than usual, due to a number of causes, but chiefly to the want of means. About one hundred volumes of miscellaneous newspapers have come in, but no files of unusual length or note, except about three hundred newspapers published in New York City before and during the War of Independence. About four hundred volumes of different papers published in Vermont between 1840 and 1900 have recently been received, but have not yet been examined, assorted and listed in such a way as to show how far they strengthen the newspapers of that State already in the Society.

A collection of some three hundred German periodicals dating between 1795 and 1818 have been exchanged with Harvard College Library for South American material. This German material had never been called for in more than fifty years, and properly belonged with a more general German collection in a more central location. Both institutions have gained by the exchange.

In books a notable gift has been received from the library of the late Frederick Lewis Gay, consisting

of between three and four hundred titles, and principally of early American imprints. These volumes have not yet been accessioned, but they contain some extremely valuable and interesting items. The well-assured judgment of Mr. Gay in collecting, his care in obtaining fine examples, and his intelligent appreciation of what was rare and historical, give ample promise of the quality of these books. To us they perpetuate the memory of a fellow member and active worker in early American history.

These thoughts suggested by the names and services of our late members are doubly enforced by actual conditions, public and societary. Each year shows the increasing cost of maintaining such collections as are possessed by this Society, and the increasing cost of extending them. Economy is enforced from the outside as well as from within, and the treasurer's reports prove how well economy is recognized by the management of the Society. It is incorrect to deplore a decadence in individual collections, for there are a larger number of collectors than at any previous time, even if the average of single collections tends to become of less size. The advent of a collection to the auction room gives it an identity and reputation which it hardly enjoyed in private ownership. Recall some of the great sales of the past—the Rice, Murphy, Menzies, Barlow, Brinley, and Hoe sales—important as they were they could not be compared to the sales of the Spenser or Huth books or the Phillips manuscripts. No one, interested in books, can go far without being impressed by the extent and nature of the quiet collecting in his experience, and by the possibilities of the future. If the smaller institutions are ruled out from competing for the wealth of good things offered, the private collector of means and intelligence accumulates and preserves, and in time passes on his holdings for dispersion, or as a memorial of his life interest by a deposit in a public institution. Mr. Gay is a case in point. This Society receives

from him as a gift what it could not buy, with the added feature of association with a member. Patience will bring its reward, and the Society can afford to wait upon a recognition of its usefulness on the part of the collector, whether a member or not. Its object must be to make itself worthy of selection as a depository and so invite confidence and generous treatment from those who have it in their power to benefit.

A consequence is a restriction in its collecting functions which will not unnecessarily compete with its own interests. Fortunately these functions have been so clearly defined in the past that little inconvenience from their recognition can arise in the future. To collect everything is today an evidence of weakness, and every effort should be bent on collecting in such lines as shall make the Society known for its specialties and as shall complement the specialties of other institutions. The American Antiquarian Society is already well known for its American imprints of the eighteenth century and for its newspaper collection. It has enjoyed such a start in these directions that no other institution—unless it is the Library of Congress—can compete with it in extent and variety. On the policy of increasing the line of imprints—the curious, the rare, and the useful—there can be no difference in opinion. Such material is still within the means of the Society and it invites gifts even of single pieces.

As to newspapers there can also be no doubt on the point of policy, but to carry it into effect involves difficult and costly problems of management. The papers of the colonial period were of excellent, quality homely in color, but strong and lasting, some that have seen little usage being as bright and crisp as on the day of issue. Even if they have suffered, modern methods of treatment will renew their lives with no damage to texture. The newspapers of the first half of the nineteenth century are also of good quality,

and when bound are as permanent as printed matter can well be. But those issued after 1870 have steadily degenerated in quality of paper and have long presented insuperable difficulties in the way of preservation. These difficulties need not be here repeated. Every librarian has met them, and in our Society, with its immense newspaper collections, it constitutes a true problem involving a continuance of its shining preëminence among collecting institutions. Today the situation is more acute than it ever was, and the solution of the problem is as distant.

For the newspaper has not only monopolized the news—its proper field—but it has drawn to itself the best of literature. Both magazines and publishers of books complain that the newspapers are more attractive to writers and pay more than they can afford, while their cheapness appeals to the readers. To the future historian the point is not without interest, and we are providing for his needs. Name some of the earlier newspapers which enjoy a wide reputation for what they contain—the *United States Gazette*, the *Aurora*, the *New York Evening Post* and the *National Intelligencer*—they are pigmies when set against the great journals of the day, and their four or six pages appear meagre when we glance at an issue of thirty-two pages on a week day or sixty pages on a Sunday. The power of the press has increased in even greater ratio, for it can make or unmake ministries, and embarrass government by exercising its criticism as a “knocker,” one who criticises recklessly or for some other purpose than to inform the public and to expose real dishonesty in government. Instead of circulating by the tens of thousands the leading journals count their sales by the quarter of a million and their readers by the million; and the old weekly which even in political excitement rarely attained a circulation of a hundred thousand, has been superseded by a weekly circulating each week many more than a million copies with

readers of uncountable extent. Important as the newspaper was in 1850, as a source of information, more or less accurate, it is of far greater moment in 1918 and tends to become of greater moment each year. And files can be preserved only by institutions—for no individual collects newspapers.

Yet this great treasury of information rests upon a foundation almost as light as air, for it is recorded on a paper which rapidly disintegrates whether used or not, whether bound or in sheets, whether sealed or exposed. A few hours in the sunlight irreparably injures the texture; exposed to sun and air, a neglect of a month reduces it to a condition in which it cannot be handled. And such it must be the chief task of this Society to collect and, if possible, preserve. Our American newspapers were offenders in this direction before the war, and war conditions have led to a further deterioration in quality. The same may be said of foreign journals, where the reduction in size has not compensated for the increasing difficulties in obtaining paper. The mere statement of the situation measures its acuteness and the obstacles to betterment. To the ordinary reader so much of the daily sheets seems unnecessary, the pages of advertisements, the discussions by the inexperienced and the local items of small note gathered from the world as news. If only the vital parts of the journal could be concentrated upon two or three pages, and not strung over pages, broken and buried by the advertisements or other necessities of the "make-up." Such pages mounted on manila paper would outlive the ordinary usage of a century; but who would undertake to select the matter to be thus preserved? Who could have the time, the patience and the intelligence? To reinforce the newspaper with crêpe-line would be too costly and unsatisfactory. Perhaps the photostat offers a remedy, for the essential parts could be reproduced by it and on a paper which still uses a percentage of rag high enough to

make it lasting. It is useless to ask the newspaper publishers to improve the quality of print paper; that quality is fixed by conditions beyond their control. The problem is one for this Society and its fellow societies, and we cannot pretend to be able even to suggest as yet a positive solution.

WORTHINGTON C. FORD,  
*For the Council.*

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